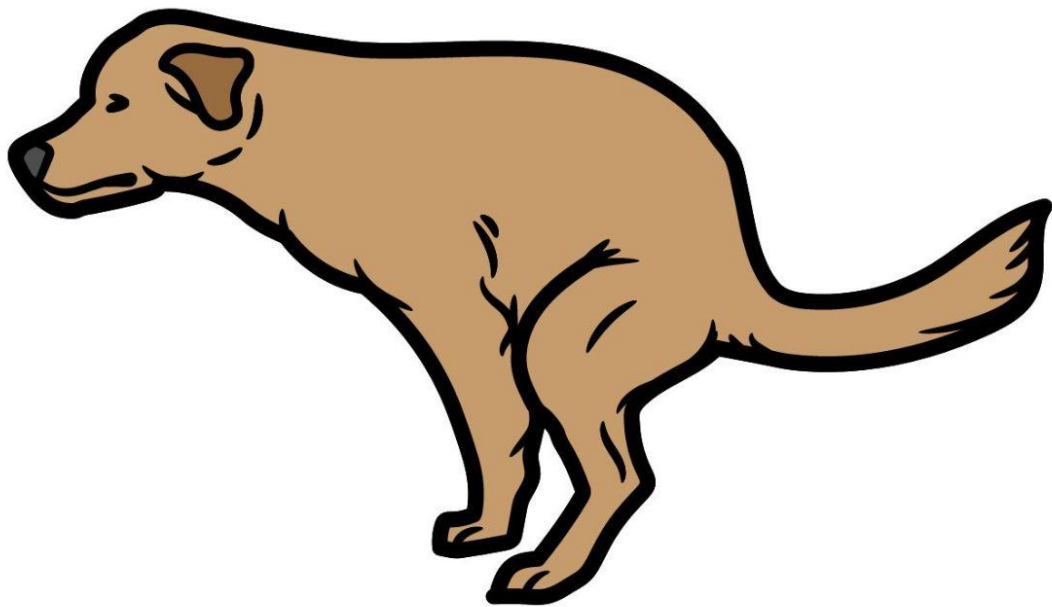


**poems
about**



shitting

by

Jonny Bolduc

poems about shitting

a microchap

Jonny Bolduc

Shitting at a House Party

Halifax, 2015

A fizzled out house party;

I'm shitting beer.

I'm listening through the wall
as my guts pour out of my body,
slapping into the water of the toilet bowl.

You're telling secrets, aren't you?
The low hum of voices emanating from
the kitchen.
Your voice cuts above like a hawk circling
between clouds.

The last clench and the last little spurt.
Hurry. She's leaving.
Your voice flies away.
Lumber downstairs,
make a drunk joke about smelling up the place.

Roll a cigarette, fling open the porch door
to see a blank canvas of night;
fleeting glances of
your yellow dress lit up by a streetlight
at the end of the block,
as you step
into darkness

I am going to pour another drink.
I am going to sink into this chair,
And I am going to watch you leave.

Shitting at a Taco Bell

No boundaries.

The only geographic landmarks
are trash bags split open
on the shoulder of the two lane road,
leaking garbage,
fast food wrappers lifting,
flying up from the force
of passing cars.

A Wendy's.

A Lowe's.

A Home Depot
across the street,
houses of orange perched,
taking sentry at the house of blue.

Two home improvement stores alike in dignity.

I need to take a wicked shit.

I accelerate a little bit,
and my 2002 Honda Civic sputters
in protest.

A Shell Station passes.

Dairy Queen.

More trash.

Stomach clenches and drops.

It's bad. Really bad.

I know it's going to take a few hours,
years,
minutes
to pass through this strip
mall and get home.

I don't have that long.
Frantic,
reacting to the pressure
and pushing at the bowels,
nauseous,
stomach sloshing
and begging to exit.

Coming up from a gentle sloping hill, I
like the horizon is giving birth.
There it is.

The combination KFC/Taco Bell.
I have shit in that bathroom many times.
Since childhood.

Friend,
I think, as I put on my blinker and slow,
about to turn into the parking lot.
I have known you since I first supped the Baja Blast,
first sunk my teeth gently into the Crunchwrap Supreme.

You have cradled me,
kept me safe.
And once again,
I come home to you,
begging for help.

Begging for you to let me take a shit.

Clenching,
I run inside the empty restaurant.
I hurry, waddling,
towards the bathroom.

And I am home.

And I rush to the stall,
and as soon as I pull down my pants
and sit on the cold toilet seat,
it sounds like a can of salsa is
dumped into the toilet,

and I am staring down at the tile watching the patterns dance
and counting them and checking Reddit
and I am on the toilet in the strip mall
and outside there is trash blowing like a sandstorm
and I am on the toilet and my stomach is clenching and unclenching,

and I am fantasizing about a Burrito Grande
while loose, diarrheal shit flows out of my ass
and the hot, heavy heat pounds against the black tar
of the expanse of parking lot that stretches forever.

Howard Needs to Shit

911, what's the address of the emergency?

Here. *Where is here?*

Howard's bedroom. He can't move. His legs are throbbing. *I hope it's deep vein thrombosis*, Howard thinks, propping his pillow under his chin. *I hope I die instantly.*

It's 4:30 p.m. The blackout curtains are trying their damndest to imitate night, but sunlight is peaking through the skylight directly above his head. A pang of pain in his chest.

Howard knows he's too fat to fit on a stepladder without breaking it so he's never tried to put a blanket or a curtain over the skylight and the beam of light seems to find him, always, when he is on the verge of sleep. Now, though, he is not on the verge of sleep. All of his counting sheep were euthanized, taken behind the woodshed and shot with a 12 gauge.

He is locked in a nightshifter's insomnia, counting the hours he has left to sleep. He's back in at 10:30 p.m. He's been awake for 21 hours. A 16 hour shift. The mental calculation, the fatigued siren; *five, four, three, two, one...wake up you fat asshole.* Another 16 hour shift coming up--ordered in for doubles, always ordered in for doubles, clopening, falling asleep in parking lots, shaking from the caffeine.

At 4:59, he falls asleep, and his last conscious thought before the vapid, surface level sleep grips him is than this "*soul is dead, necrotic, diseased, and spreading.*"

At 9:00, he wakes up. Lumbering to the bathroom, he shits, his fat rolls like piles of flesh laying on his lap. He reaches behind to wipe and can't get it all the feces so he starts the shower and sprays his portable bidet into his inflamed asshole. His wife climbs up the stairs, and leans her head in the bathroom.

Whatever she says, Howard can't hear her. He's deep in the nothing, lost in the fog of mental negation. She repeats. He still doesn't respond, doesn't even register another human voice.

"GOODNIGHT!" she yells into the bathroom.

He grunts. The longest conversation they've had in three days. He gets out, water dripping off his flesh. He doesn't brush his teeth, comb his hair. He stares at his reflection for a while. Looks down at his phone. 9:45. He's late. He puts on dirt underwear, pulls a black polo on, and pulls his size 58 khakis over his stomach. He doesn't remember to take his Lexapro, and he grabs his keys. A pang of chest pain; a gasp.

"I hope it happens," he whispers to himself as he lowers himself into the car and drives to work.

911, what's the address of the emergency? Howard says into the oversized black phone. *My friend just shot himself in the head. Oh my god he's dead,*" the caller stammers, his voice cracking with fear. He gives his address; a cabin in the middle of the woods.

"Sir, where is the gun?" Howard asks. Because even if someone just shot himself in the head three feet from his best friend and left chunks and splatters of his own flesh on his best friend's shirt, he has to ask where the gun is first. For the safety of the officer.

And there is a script. He reads it off my computer. The first thing 911 trainers teach is that the script knows better than the dispatcher does. That if a dispatcher goes rouge, diverts from the scripted questions, everything devolves into chaos.

Howard wants to say he's sorry, ask the caller to take a deep breath, ever say what he wants to say. First, he has to ask: *where is the gun*, even though he knows that the gun is probably under a pile of flesh and brain chunks.

I'm so sorry, he wants to say. *I'm so sorry*.

He knows that if his wife or family ever called and he picked up the phone he would think, *fuck the script*. But Howard is not fucking the script tonight. He's already had a non-compliant quality assurance review this month (yes, they quality control 911 calls) and even if this guy's best friend just blew his head off, Howard is vying for compliance.

He's not vying to have to go back into the office and have a box of tissues slid to him while the manager asks him, *is everything okay? We've noticed your performance--*

911 what's the address of the emergency?

Howard doesn't know. His chest always hurts. The emergency is everywhere.

Howard's legs and ankles are swollen from sitting. He's gained almost 100 pounds in two years, since he started this job. His ankles are three times the size they should be and when he presses down on his leg the flesh stays indented and that's not a good sign. It's a sign that he could have a heart attack.

Sir, I need you to calm down and tell me your address.

Howard is back to the spring of 2019 when he tried to kill himself. He is knee deep in a river that is flooded with springtime snowmelt. He is drunk. He is going to jump in, let the water drag him into the undertow. He hopes someone will find his bloated body frosted and blue and you are going to find him dead and he is going to do it--

Back to 2022. *Sir, what is the address of your emergency?*

"Out of all the times I have tried to kill myself this is the slowest. I'm getting fatter. Four Red Bulls. Falling asleep in my car on the way home from a 16 hour overnight shift. Can't wipe my own ass, too fat," Howard thinks.

11:29 p.m.

911 what's the address of the emergency?

My husband fell out of bed and I can't lift him you're going to need to send the fire department. Howard is eating stale McDonalds chased by Little Debbies. He answers the 911 line and he leaves grease stains on the oversized receiver.

911 what's the address of the emergency?

We're pulled over on Route 4 next to the meatpacking plant, my husband said his stomach hurt and now he's clutching his chest and OH MY GOD HE'S NOT BREATHING and this for Howard this is just a Tuesday night and this is everyday and this is forever. And this is where he will die, in this rolling chair with his stupid headset sipping a Monster Energy and eating pork fried rice and scrolling Facebook while he talks to someone who's husband is having a heart attack.

911 what's the address of the emergency?

"I'm so sorry," Howard says.

What's the address? "I can't do this anymore."

Where are you?

"The days are full of the phone ringing and the nights are full of the phone ringing and the inbetweens are full of the phone ringing and I am here in this rolling chair in this dispatch center and I am nodding off while someone tells me they got into a car accident and the woman they rear ended is bleeding from the head and I fell asleep for thirty seconds on the phone with him and woke up to him asking "Are you there?" (and can you imagine calling 911 and the dispatcher FALLS ASLEEP?) and I think I am having a heart attack all the time and I am taking too much Lexapro I am skipping my doses I am not falling asleep I am sleeping all day when I am not working I am sleeping when I am sleeping I am on the phone asking..."

911 what's the address of the emergency?

The emergency is that Howard has to do this again. And again. And again. The worst part is waking up. The worst part is not dying in his sleep.

But it's Howard's night off, and that's a little bit better than "worst," he figures. His wife leaves for work as he comes home. He says hello to her as she gets into her car. It's a good morning. He goes to sleep right at 8:30 a.m. Sure his heart is pounding, and he has to rise a few times to piss and shit out the sludgy vile that sloshes around in his stomach (he figures he hasn't had a solid bowel movement in two years) but at least he can rise in the midafternoon. Snuggle a cat. Play Skyrim. Watch Netflix with his wife.

4:30 p.m., his phone rings. They ask/tell him to come in and I am back in at 11 p.m. He has worked for 12 consecutive days. It won't stop, it will never stop. His chest hurts.

Sometimes, the job is like the movies. *911 what's the address of the emergency?* 32 Walker Mills Road, Bethel, Maine.

Our autistic eight year old fell in the hot tub and we don't know how long he was under and he's not breathing and he's turning purple. *Ok, thank you for telling me that. I need you to lie him on the ground or a firm or flat surface. Put your ear to his mouth. Can you see or hear any breath?* No, he's not breathing. *Ok, listen carefully. We need to start CPR, so please listen to these instructions. I need you to press firm and fast in the center of the chest, just below the nipple. Let's start now, and count with me so I know we're doing it right. One. One. Two...m'aam, are you there? M'aam?* It's not working. He's

not breathing. Oh my God, he's not breathing. *M'aam, listen, take a deep breath. I know this is scary, but if you work with me to help your son--* CAN'T YOU HEAR ME? HE'S NOT BREATHING! SEND THE AMBULANCE NOW! *The ambulance is heading to you as fast and as safely as it can. We need to do CPR to try and help--* HE'S DEAD. HE'S FUCKING DEAD. *What's your name?* SEND THE FUCKING AMBULANCE YOU PIECE OF SHIT. *The ambulance is coming, please, m'aam, we need to do CPR.* HE'S NOT BREATHING!

There's two trajectories Howard can take. He can't force anyone to do CPR. He can't reach through the phone and do it himself.

Option one. Outcome: fired.

Jesus Christ, I know you're scared, he could say, but your kid drowned and YOU ARE THE ONLY PERSON who can save them. Stop swearing at me and FUCKING DO CPR ON YOUR CHILD.

Option two. Outcome: oh holy mother of God.

M'aam, I know your scared, but we really need to work together to make sure that your son is okay. We need to do CPR. Let's start again. One...two..three..

Howard picked option two.

The child died.

Howard did his job.

He got off the phone and went to the bathroom. Staring at himself, his blank, pale ghost, he thought "maybe I should cry."

He couldn't.

Greeted by a stranger with Cheeto crumbs in his beard, bags under his eyes, an animated dead man. He couldn't force himself to cry, so he took a shit.

And he lumbers back to his desk, the phone rings, and he talks to someone who had their car towed during the parking ban and was going to sue Howard and the police department and the entire county. The dead eight year old slowly faded, and Howard never thought about him again. He was dying, what made him a human being slowly chipped away.

Later, a female voice, calls and says an eight year-old in the apartment is vomiting and isn't breathing right. Harold sends an ambulance. As soon as the ambulance gets there, the medic, in a voice that, even through the static and crackling of the radio conveys a sense of *oh my god this kid is going to die*, says "We've started CPR, send another crew and a Lucas Machine." A Lucas machine is basically a lifesaving strap-on chest compressor, and this tandem request spells out something terrible.

Jesus I thought the kid was just throwing up? Howard thinks. How is he dying? What is happening? And I think he'll make it, right? How bad can it be?

The answer, usually, is *much worse*.

The Lucas Machine and the crew came and the kid dies. Howard can tell through the heavy breathing and panicked voices that the EMTs tried their best but did Howard? *Did I do enough? How did it even happen? It doesn't make sense.*

During shift change, Howard and his coworkers sat around in our rollie chairs like the people from Wall-e. They talked about notable calls. People being shitheads. People getting arrested, a father and son who got drunk and beat the shit out of each other for the third time in a month, endless domestic disputes,. a guy who drank a liter of vodka in the woods behind the Walgreens and was vomiting blood.

Today, Howard and friends got to talking about someone who didn't make it, someone who died in a car accident, and they talk about how the guy's spouse kept calling and asking questions in the middle of a rush of calls *and how annoying it was*. Terri, the 35 year veteran of the department, says, *lady, your husband died, that's what you get. Stop calling.*

Howard stops talking, grits his teeth in annoyance. *We're always looking for someone to blame; the man who died of an overdose, the person who dared to have a panic attack in a parking lot, the schizophrenic woman who was arrested for going through trash in the McDonald's*, he thinks.

That's what you get. Your husband sliding off the road and dying. You get what you deserve. And if I rise up and I do it again and I rise up and I do it again don't I deserve it?

His chest hurts. He clocks out and drives home. He needs to take a shit.

